Perceptions of K-12 Alternative Education Program Leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia

By Angela Thiemann

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Commonwealth of Virginia

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ABSTRACT

Preparation leadership programs for beginning and inexperienced alternative education program leaders are mostly non-existent (Price & Doney 2009). Although finding administrators who have a passion for the alternative education setting is difficult, the challenge and goal to prepare these new leaders to become highly effective leaders in the alternative education environment is just as challenging. "There is little research, however, on exactly what leaders of alternative education programs need in terms of skills, preparation, and training to be successful" (Price & Martin, 2010, p. 3).

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation needed for effective alternative education program leadership. Utilizing a basic qualitative research design, structured interviews were used to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation needed for leadership.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Preparation leadership programs for beginning and inexperienced alternative education program leaders are mostly non-existent (Price & Doney 2009). Although finding administrators who have a passion for the alternative education setting is difficult, the challenge and goal to prepare these new leaders to become highly effective leaders in the alternative education environment is just as challenging. "There is little research, however, on exactly what leaders of alternative education programs need in terms of skills, preparation, and training to be successful" (Price & Martin, 2010, p. 3). This dissertation studied K-12 alternative education leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia's perceptions of leadership experiences, essential skills, specialized training and preparation on alternative school leadership.

The research study utilized interviews to implement a basic qualitative research design to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This study's research had a focus on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation needed for effective K-12 alternative education program leadership. All the data obtained provided K-12 alternative education program leadership perceptions about how these findings could assist aspiring school leaders to become better informed on alternative education leadership.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Mr. and Mrs. Harry D. Knauf. Although you are not alive to see my graduation, your spirit and love for education is still on the forefront of all my life long endeavors.

For my husband, C.T, who effortlessly encourages me and commends me for all the challenges I take on. I love you more than you will ever know!

To my children, Parker and Autumn. You are the reason I wake up each and every day. I love you more than you will ever know, and never forget to pursue your dreams.

To my brother, Jason. Your drive to succeed and your love towards family is relentless. I will always respect and appreciate your service to our country. Your kind spirit inspires me and I am so blessed I am your sister. I love you!

To my mother and father. Thank you for always lending a hand when needed and instilling the ambition in me that anything is possible if you work hard and stay focused. I appreciate all you have done for me and will never forget how you taught me to never quit. I love you!

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Dr. Carol Cash was always available even when her internet was rather spotty during the crazy COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Cash, thank you for having the patience of a saint! Dr. John Gratto, thank you so much for all of your input. Last, but certainly not least, Dr. Timothy Stoops. Thank you for never ceasing to praise me and always finding time to talk. Also, Thank you for always offering positive praise and encouragement.

CHAPTER ONE: THE INTRODUCTION

As stated by Price et al. (2012), "Alternative education is an integral, yet frequently overlooked and misunderstood component in many public school districts in the United States" (p. 23). Price and Martin (2011), suggest that both traditional and alternative school programs are virtually impossible to raise underperforming students to an optimal level of academic success without a principal as an instructional leader. Educational leaders are tasked with creating school cultures that facilitate teaching and learning. "If we are truly committed to school reform, we need to prepare and train leaders to be truly effective school leaders in alternative education" (Price, 2009, p. 11). This includes alternative education programs. This study examined the perceptions of four K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Background

Principals are not specifically trained for leadership roles relating to general, alternative, or special education programs; however, the responsibility of the principal is to oversee these programs and sometimes directly lead the alternative education programs (Elliott & Clifford, 2014). Traditional public school education uses alternative education programs as a necessary tool in order to sufficiently meet the needs of at-risk elementary and secondary school students (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Alternative education program leaders who are consumed with the challenging daily operation of their program find themselves establishing, preparing, and training without any

formalized professional preparation, knowledge, and skills that are critical in creating successful specialized programs aimed at meeting the individualized needs of the students they serve. Ferebee-Johns (2017) suggested, "School administrators are assigned to lead schools and therefore have the responsibility for improving schools" (p. 1). Stoops (2012) wrote, "In many cases, those individuals who oversee such programs are school administrators who are certified school principals" (p. 5).

Moreover, the course of study required for administrators to become certified principals lacks specialized instruction focused on the specialized needs in alternative education. "The role of the principal, as the school leader, in implementing effective change in public schools became a key factor in school reform" (Price & Martin, 2011, p. 69). Ferebee-Johns (as cited in Price et al., (2011) noted that, in addition to examining alternative education program leadership characteristics, it is also important to explore the "actions and the manner through which they are demonstrated daily in principal's behavior" (p. 1). Price and Stoops (2012) addressed the lack of studies examining the leadership of alternative education practitioners. Ferebee-Johns (as cited in Price et al., 2010) noted, "There is a shortage of qualified individuals willing to assume responsibilities for leading alternative education environments" (p. 4). An expansion of leadership perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders is a step in gaining an understanding of how to become an effective alternative education program leader. There may be unique experiences, skills, training, and preparation associated with effectiveness in the alternative education setting, and thus the need to identify those areas.

In order to gain a complete understanding of what alternative education program leadership entails, this study sought to examine the leadership perspectives of K-12 alternative

1

education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia is necessary to further acquire information on alternative education program leadership.

Alternative Education Program Leadership Experiences and Skills

Training and readiness opportunities for working with large populations of at-risk students have not been provided to alternative school principals in traditional principal preparation program course work; this includes lack of internship experiences in settings targeting at-risk populations of students (Price et al., 2017). According to Price et al. (2017), the lack of preparation and training for alternative education program leaders has revealed that this lack of accountability "appears to be disadvantaged for traditionally underserved students" (p. 15). "To prepare effective school leaders some new skills and likely some re-training is needed for effective leadership to reside in all schools, and this may be an especially critical component for leadership in alternative schools" (Price & Martin, 2011, p. 71).

Influences that guide beginning leaders to become alternative education program leaders are limited, and there is even less research on what preparation is most effective for inexperienced administrators planning on leading successful alternative education programs. (Price & Martin, 2010). Shortages in educational leaders and leaders who are not prepared can inhibit student progress in the elementary and secondary levels of education (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler 2010). According to Price (2010), preparing and training leaders who can effectively lead alternative education programs is challenging in school divisions across the nation and the country. Formative research suggests that overtime and thorough professional development opportunities, leadership qualities will develop over time (Day et al., 2008). "Even with traditional preparation, beginning and inexperienced practitioners are easily overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the what of school leadership, and many contend the training leaders receive

is off target" (Price et a., 2010, p. 1). This is especially true when considering diverse needs of students served by alternative education programs.

Alternative Education Program Leadership Training

The needs of students served in alternative education programs are different from those students served in more traditional education programs. "There is much more to leading in [an alternative education setting] and much more that needs to be done to train and prepare leaders to lead in alternative schools" (Price, 2009, p. 2). Research has shown that when students are removed from traditional settings, the skill sets, abilities, and capacities that leaders and teachers employ to reach at-risk or students in alternative schools become an important component of the success of alternative school students (Price & Doney, 2009). There is a general perception that most programs are ineffective, but there is not enough research to support or abrogate such perceptions. There is a need for higher education to examine and review current course requirements and practices associated with principal preparation programs.

Preparation for Alternative Education Programs

Alternative education program leaders working with at-risk student populations "require specific preparation with appropriate training and support so they can lead staff toward teaching effectively and for at-risk students to learn successfully" (Price, 2009, p. 5). There is a large body of research relating to the beliefs guiding traditional school principals. In contrast, there is little to no support for alternative education program administrators. According to Stoops (2012), the education leaders who oversee alternative education programs are certified to lead in comprehensive school settings—not alternative school settings focused on providing for the unique needs of at-risk students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation needed for program leadership. There are four leadership specificity themes proposed in order to establish what alternative education program leaders perceive to be important or not important to effective leadership in alternative education programs. By identifying these perceptions, this study aimed to provide data to improve upon the effectiveness of alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Research Questions

This study examined the leadership needs of alternative education programs as perceived by current alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What leadership experiences do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

2. What leadership skills do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for individuals new to the position of alternative education leader?

3. What specialized training do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

4. How do alternative education leaders perceive their leadership preparation programs informed their work as an alternative education leader?

4

Significance/Justification of the Study

This study is significant in order to explore the effectiveness of alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. First, the role of alternative education program leaders may differ across school divisions, thus creating an inconsistency to maintain high level leadership effectiveness. Secondly, it is important to examine the needs of alternative education program leaders in order to develop effective, long lasting alternative education program leaders. The diverse practices of alternative education program leaders are a specialized instructional leadership approach in itself. The unique nature of alternative schools and their students dictate that leaders in those settings require different skill sets to lead effectively. Alternative education program leaders need training in differing skills, competences, and mindsets than their traditional school leader counterparts in order to be successful in alternative school settings (Price & Doney, 2009).

If the experiences, skills, and training needed to be effective in alternative education can be identified, then principal preparation programs can address those and provide more effective leaders. For the improvement of alternative education programs and for at-risk students and students who have dropped out of school to have a place to go, "it's not just the children who need to learn. Strong leaders are essential to academic success, and they need to be cultivated as carefully as their students" (Samuels, 2008). With such little research on K-12 alternative education program leadership specific to the Commonwealth of Virginia, leaders of these programs may feel as though they are isolated and inquiring if the leadership role they hold has any commonality with others who have similar positions (Stoops, 2012). According to Price (2009),

When at-risk students participate in alternative programs under prepared and trained

leaders who know how to engage at-risk students and inspire a staff through relationship-

based and research-supported approaches and interventions, success for some of our most

difficult school populations and schools becomes possible (p. 11).

A direct examination of the two populations will assist in gaining a better understanding of their

leadership role in comparison to their colleagues.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed by the researcher illustrated how alternative school

program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia perceive their leadership experiences to be

necessary for alternative education program leadership. Figure 1 outlines how alternative

education program leadership development is formed by previous experiences, on the job skill

development, specialized training, and leadership preparation programs.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Model of the Effectiveness of K-12 Alternative Education Program

Leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia

The conceptual framework suggests that leadership experiences, skills, training, and preparation with a concentration on K-12 alternative education programs, has a positive impact on leadership. In order to establish what alternative education program leaders perceived to be important in order to lead effectively, this study sought to demonstrate the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders. The conceptual framework of this study was organized and guided data received from participants in order to gain a better understanding of what is

necessary to be an effective alternative education program leader in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms provide a guide for significance in this study.

Alternative education: "a public school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school" (Sable et al., 2010, p. C-1).

At- Risk: Students of which have an increased risk of dropping out of school (VDOE, 2013).

Educational Leadership: A principal is expected to take responsibility for all students' learning and opportunities of growth (Graczewski et al., 2009).

Leader: Communicates a vision that turns self-interest into commitment to a job (Ch. et al., (2017).

Principal: An instructional leader who serves as a key element in which enriches the lies of students (Waters & Marzano, 2007).

Professional Development: "Professional development can be defined as a career-long process in which educators fine-tune their teaching to meet student needs" (Diaz-Maggioli, 2017, para 17).

Project Return: "Existing alternative programs in the three school divisions have been expanded to work with expelled and suspended students or those in the stages before referral for long-term suspension or expulsion. These programs serve a potential of 55 high-risk students in grades K-12. Each program offers a different instructional approach. One program targets study skills, character education, employment skills, and also offers after school tutoring. The second offers an after-school program, and the third program provides home instruction or Saturday school. The outcome for all three programs is for students to progress satisfactorily and be able to re-enter the regular school program, or obtain a General Educational Development (commonly referred to as a GED), or certificate of completion from the alternative education program" (VDOE, 2013, para 16).

Project RETURN: "Project RETURN was formed to assist school divisions in addressing the educational, social, and emotional needs of students who require an alternative educational program. Selected students from each locality receive instruction through the Project RETURN model. The model allows the locality to provide instruction at home or within the local alternative education center using the best in available software and online curriculum. The mentor teacher, in collaboration with the sending home school staff, developed an individualized academic program based on the student's ability level and the appropriate Virginia Standards of Learning. The ultimate goal is the student's successful transition into the regular academic setting. The program can involve up to 75 students in grades K-12" (VDOE, 2013, para 17).

Limitations/Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation needed for effective alternative education program leadership. The methodology in this study utilized a study consisting of a series of interviews and was primarily qualitative in design. These interviews are secured and available upon request. The primary limitations of this study were that participants were only a sampling of four alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Additionally, a limitation was the stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Another limitation was the willingness of K-12 alternative education program leaders to be honest and accurate when exposing their perceptions. Furthermore; a few of the selected population declined the opportunity to participate and presented an additional limitation. Lastly, the research study may not be in alignment with the schools divisions' interests therefore the study was declined.

The primary delimitations of this study was its focus primarily on leadership. The study was limited to the leaders of alternative education programs in Project Return and Project RETURN. It was further limited due to the stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was not directly correlated with the design or structure of alternative education programs in their entirety nor did this study concern itself with leadership outside of these in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Organization of Study

Chapter one presents the background of the study, statement of problem, purpose of the study, significance and justification, research questions, conceptual framework, definitions and key terms of the study, and limitations/delimitations of the study, which focused on perceptions of alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature including a detailed search process, used to obtain the literature, a focus on the history of alternative education, alternative education in Virginia, and perceptions of alternative education. Chapter Two also presents literature examining effective alternative education program leadership, which are the focus areas in this study. Chapter Three restates the purpose of the study, outlines the research design, research design justification, research questions and population/sampling. This also included the methodology used in this research study. Data collection procedures and data management techniques are followed by a timeline and summary of methodology within Chapter Three. Lastly, Chapter Four reports and discusses the results related to this study, and Chapter Five includes a discussion of the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and reflections on the study.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"As the needs of nontraditional [alternative education] grows, so does the need for educational leaders with specialized skills to lead staff members in alternative settings" (Ferebee-Johns, 2017, p. 46). Price et al. (2010) stated, "Because the skills required of educators in alternative settings are not recognized as important or as priorities in the traditional higher education preparation curriculum few programs exist to meet this increasing need for trained administrators who can successfully lead in correctional education and alternative schools" (p. 301). The purpose for conducting this study was to provide insight on the experiences, skills, training/preparation necessary for effective alternative education program leadership.

Background Data

"An alternative school leader must be a clear communicator who builds upon his/her strengths in order to communicate to others what a positive, productive school environment that supports teachers and enables students' looks and feels like" (Price, 2010, p. 307). This literature review examined scholarly research associated with a focus on the challenges in alternative education program leadership. In addition, leadership preparation and practices for individuals assigned to lead alternative education programs were examined. This review was synthesized to (a) define alternative education programs; (b) summarize the history of alternative education, (c) describe leadership perceptions of alternative education programs; (d) identify effective leadership styles and/or practices that support alternative education programs; and (e) identify preparation programs for alternative education program leaders.

Search Process

The process for identifying literature to review involved multiple search methods. An initial search of the key terms alternative education conducted using Google Scholar with a target

year search of 2005-2019 yielded 1,720,000 articles and books. Upon adding leadership to the original input of alternative education, the search yielded 1,540,000 sources. Online search engines such as Google Scholar, EBSCOHost, and the Virginia Tech online library were utilized to find scholarly peer- reviewed literature.

History of Alternative Education

Historically, alternative education has been specifically focused on students who do not meet the expectations set forth by the public school system since as early as 1974. Alternative education during this time acted similar to a laboratory, where students who were daring and unique were evaluated. "The most investigated among these populations are students who have dropped out of their regular schools or who are at risk of dropping out because of failure in a conventional school setting" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 15).

According to VDOE (2013), the "1993 General Assembly directed the VDOE to establish and implement regional pilot projects to provide an educational alternative for certain students" (para 1). For example, one of Virginia's Regional alternative education programs is Project Return. This alternative education program targets Powhatan, Goochland, and Louisa County Public schools. According to VDOE, (2013), their program focus is defined formally as follows: "Existing alternative education programs in these three school divisions have been expanded to work with expelled and suspended students or those in the stages before referral for long-term suspension or expulsion. These programs serve a potential of 55 high-risk students in grades K-12. Each program offers a different instructional approach. One program targets study skills, character education, employment skills, and also offers after school tutoring. The second offers an after-school program, and the third program provides home instruction or Saturday school" (n.p). "The outcome for all three programs is for students to progress satisfactorily and

be able to re-enter the regular school program, or obtain a General Educational Development ([commonly referred to as a] GED), or certificate of completion from the alternative education program" (VDOE, 2013, para 17).

The educational system uses alternative education programs to isolate challenging and disruptive students that are normally not accepted in traditional school settings. (Lehr et al., 2009). Successful, and proactive programs are given much thought and planning that requires time, energy and a foundation built on trust. (Leone et al., (2001). "The field of education has never accepted alternative education programs as a viable option for students who are at-risk of academic failure" (Gode, 2013, p.1).

Statistical research shows that one-third of most American students are labeled as at-risk for academic failure; with dropping out of school being the main result of this failure (Galvin, 2016). "In response to higher expectations and standards, many school divisions have developed alternative education programs for students whose behaviors disrupt the learning of others and otherwise interfere with the order of the school environment. Often these alternative education settings are punitive responses or last chance options for youth" (Leone et al., 2001, p. 88). "The concentration of alternatives for at-risk children and the potential for the marginalization of students who attend the various alternatives have invited comment throughout the history of the movement" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 9).

Many alternative education programs are considered as a last resort option for students identified as at risk. As defined by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) (2013), an at-risk student is any student(s) who has a higher-than-average probability of dropping out or failing school. "Educators have likely encountered students who exhibit challenging behaviors, low motivation, poor attendance, failing grades, or an overall disengaged or passive attitude, or

perhaps have worked with students who have consistently fallen below grade level, are completely defiant, or are afraid to even walk into the school building" (Mailett, 2017, p.1). These students fall under the label of at-risk. To meet the needs of students who do not experience success in traditional high schools, school divisions increasingly rely on alternative schools and programs to provide basic educational services to a subset of students (Hodge et al., (2014).

Alternative Education in Virginia

For the purposes of this research, alternative education in Virginia refers to those programs that are classified by the state of Virginia as Regional Alternative Education Programs. As of July 2017, the VDOE reports there are currently 28 regional public alternative education programs. The 28 regional public alternative education programs service multiple counties within the state of Virginia. All 28 regional public alternative education programs collaboratively work to establish a differentiated instructional approach in order to provide access to traditional school instruction. According to VDOE (2013), under the 2006 Virginia School Code § 22.1-209.1:2; Regional Alternative Education Programs are defined as the following:

> "With such funds as may be appropriated for this purpose, the Board of Education
> shall establish a program consisting of alternative education options for
> elementary, middle, and high school students in compliance with subdivision D 6
> of 22.1-253.13:1 who:
>
> (i) have committed an offense in violation of school board policies relating to
> weapons, alcohol or drugs, or intentional injury to another person, or against
> whom a petition or warrant has been filed alleging such acts or school board
> charges alleging such policy violations are pending.

14

(ii) have been expelled from school attendance or have received one suspension

for an entire semester, or have received two or more long-term suspensions within

one school year;

or (iii) have been released from a juvenile correctional center and have been

identified by the Superintendent of the Department of Juvenile Justice's Division

of Education and the relevant division superintendent as requiring a regional

alternative education program" (School Discipline Laws & Regulations by State

& Category | Safe Supportive Learning, 2016, para 1),

In regards to how students are assigned an alternative education placement, School

Discipline Laws & Regulations by State & Category | Safe Supportive Learning (2016)

stated,

Based on available space, a student may also be administratively assigned to a

regional alternative education program either at the request of the parent and with

the consent of the division superintendent or by the division superintendent after

written notice to the student and his/her parent. Such notice of the opportunity for

the student and/or his parent(s) to participate in a hearing conducted by the

division superintendent or his designee regarding such placement shall be issued

and the assignment shall be final unless altered by the school board, upon timely

written petition, in accordance with regulations of the school board, by the student

or his parent, for a review of the record by the school board. However, no child

shall be assigned to any regional alternative education program described in this

section for more than one school year without an annual assessment of the

placement to determine the appropriateness of transitioning the child into the school division's regular program (para 1).

According to VDOE (2013), in order to create a more effective academic environment for students, specific training for inexperienced alternative education administrators must incorporate best practice indicators. Similarly, Ferebee-Johns (2017) indicates, "Principals must deal with many complex issues such as changes in organization structures, curriculum, instruction, pupil management, school community relationships, new technology, and knowledge of alternative paths for helping students reach graduation status" (p. 21). VDOE, (2013) suggests the following are best practice indicators utilized in Virginia's alternative education programs:

"Regional alternative education programs in Virginia focus on a range of instructional delivery services. The delivery of services ranges from classroom instruction to distance learning, from day and after-school programs to evening programs. The VDOE (2013), "states while there is some variation in programs, all use best practices and provide for: annual assessment of placement; intensive, accelerated instructional program, with high standards for academic achievement and student behavior; low pupil-teacher ratio (average ratio is one teacher for every 10 students); collaborative efforts with parents and the community; program evaluation; and staff development and training" (para 17).

Currently in the Commonwealth of Virginia, there are no set requirements/benchmarks as a method of assessment for students enrolled in alternative programs. However, regional alternative education programs serve a plethora of diverse student needs such as credit recovery, high school equivalency testing, behavior modification, and other behaviorally based challenges that can only be served in a more unconventional setting. These obstacles students face emotionally inhibit their abilities to coexist in a traditional school setting. According to McNulty

and Roseboro (2009), "we offer implications for alternative schools in general and suggest that their design, by definition, can reinforce the stigmatized identity and its corresponding deviant behavior" (p. 1). "Alternative education programs are often intended to support students who are underperforming academically, have learning disabilities, display emotional or behavioral issues, and are victims of other students with behavioral problems, demonstrate a high risk of dropping out of school, or display the need for individualized instruction" (Coles et al., 2009, p. 3)

Perceptions of Alternative Education Program Leadership

According to Price (2009), "Training leaders for alternative schools remains even more off-target and mired in the model we use to train those leading traditional schools" (p. 2). Stoops (2012), suggested "with little formalized research in the area of Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth leadership, one way of establishing a baseline for its conceptualization is to compare the leaders of these programs to their more traditional school administrative colleagues" (p. 8). Structured preparation for any instructional leader is vital to the success of their students, especially in alternative education settings (Price et al., (2010). "But the truth is that neither universities nor [school divisions] can single-handedly provide the breadth of experiences needed to adequately prepare school leaders whose leadership will result in improved learning for at-risk and alternative students in alternative school settings" (Price, 2009, p. 2).

Alternative Education Program Leadership Experiences

Mastering the challenges targeting aspiring alternative education program leaders working with at-risk student populations are necessary for the success of these specialized programs. According to Price & Martin (2011), "The role of the principal is multifaceted and includes leadership that is related to: instruction, mentorship, staff development, strategic planning, and being a change agent" (p. 69). Although finding administrators who have a passion

for the alternative education setting is difficult, the goal to prepare these new leaders to become highly qualified alternative education program leaders is just as challenging.

Merendez (2007) suggested, "Because of the uniqueness of alternative schools, it is important that teaching professionals and administrators stay abreast of best practices applicable to the students they serve" (p.19). Student engagement can increase depending on the level of acceptance of teachers and administrators who are actively concerned of those students' interests and personalities (Cooper, 2014; Hattie, 2012; Marzano, 2011). Additionally, Price et al. (2010) suggested, "It seems to some that, even with changes, traditional programs are still not equipped to prepare those who will lead staffs and students in the growing numbers of alternative schools" (p. 300). Farnsworth et al. (2019), noted that in order to support excellence academically and behaviorally; instructional leadership skills are crucial to the advancement of student achievement.

Positive leadership is all about seeing and creating a brighter and better future (Gordon, 2017). Levine (2005) contends that higher education preparation programs are not preparing novice leaders effectively. "For alternative schools to improve, and for at-risk and dropouts to have a place to go, 'it's not just children who need to learn'" (Price, 2009, p. 5).

"The challenge and goal is to prepare and train leaders who can lead in special schools while implementing proven AE principles and strategies in school divisions, counties, and states across the nation that are facing their own AE and dropout crisis" (Ferebee-Johns, 2017, p. 16). "The skills needed to lead dissimilar schools are different, as is the emphasis on what skills and abilities are most important in leaders who take learning environments to a place where both school options serve students successfully" (Price, 2009, p. 3). Leadership style is developed around motivating others, thus creating a mission and vision for the school, empowering others

and creating a collaborative environment (Hanbury, 2001). According to Price (2009), "The overall goal for alternative education and traditional education is the same - improved learning and increased student achievement for all school students" (p. 3).

Alternative Education Program Leadership Skills

"Your most important job as a leader is to drive the culture --- and not just any culture" (Gordon, 2017, p 16). Murphy (2009) indicated that "effective leadership is a critical factor in school success, and as such, one more step in leadership preparation that must be considered is a program in advanced certification for principals, teachers and leaders that will support excellence within the profession and, most importantly, promote student success in all settings" (p. 2-3). Fullan (2014) suggested, specific leader behaviors need to be taught and understood in order for behavior to change.

Inexperienced alternative education program leaders must develop a specific skill set targeted to best meet the needs of their most challenging students. Maillet (2017) identifies six powerful practices as essential pieces to the academic and behavior success of alternative education students. The six practices are: "(1) provide active and creative instruction; (2) integrate service learning opportunities; (3) accelerate student learning; (4) building time in the schedule to connect with kids; (5) have a plan B (and C) for every student every day; (6) utilize volunteers such as college students and community members" (p. 234). These specific skills must encompass a dynamic set of practices essential to the academic and behavioral success of students, however these same characteristics are beneficial to aspiring alternative education administrators.

Ferebee-Johns (2017) states, "As the need for alternative education instruction becomes more prevalent in environments outside of public school settings, so does the need for trained

leaders" (p. 41). Price (2009), suggested that school leaders "must be able to go beyond modeling the way and to 'shape the future' (be a strategist) with others. They need to go beyond being a visionary and 'make things happen' (be an executor) or to execute a shared vision. They need to go beyond challenging the process and 'engage today's talent' (to be a talent manager) for each of those they work with in alternative education" (p. 9).

Alternative Education Program Leadership Specialized Training

Becoming a proactive leader is demonstrating characteristics which show an eagerness to do what's required to succeed. The theory of resilience targeting education is an ecological, strengths-focused approach to understanding how youth overcome adversity to succeed (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Resnick, 2000). Developing positive relationships and building resilience based on trust and understanding is the key to connecting with alternative education students. Each adult and child must believe that every student in the program can learn and can achieve at higher levels (Maillet, 2017). Price (2009) suggests, "teacher opinions may not be the best basis for constructing a new leadership development program, but certainly the thoughts and feelings of those who will be our candidates and future leaders should influence our thinking and planning and even our course objectives and offerings" (p. 8). "Training leaders who understand the unique characteristics of at-risk and alternative learners can help ensure success for staff and students in alternative schools" (Price, 2009, p. 1).

Preparation for Alternative Education Programs

The course of study required for administrators to become certified principals lacks specialized instruction to focus on the challenges in alternative education program leadership. Ferebee-Johns' (2017), emphasized that "Quality specialized professional development is a purposeful and intentional process that can bring about positive change and improvement to an

educational environment" (p. 25). "The challenge and goal is to prepare and train leaders who can lead in alternative schools while implementing proven alternative education principles and strategies in school divisions, counties, and states throughout the country that are facing their own alternative education and dropout crisis" (Ferebee-Johns, 2017, p. 16). According to Ferebee-Johns (2017), (as cited in Simonsen & Sugai, 2013) noted, specialization in leadership preparation and professional development programs specialized in alternative education "is needed to offer more intensified services along with meeting instructional, behavioral, and organizational characteristics of traditional public school environments" (p. 23).

Price & Martin (2011), stated that "some new skills and likely some training...for effective leadership to reside in all schools, and this may be an especially component of leadership in alternative schools" (p. 71). "The Council of Chief of State School Officers (CCSSO) in collaboration with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) adopted the educational leadership policy standards known throughout the education community as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)" (Wilmore, n.d.). These standards were "recast with a stronger, clearer emphasis on students as learners, outlining foundational principles of leadership to help ensure that each child is well educated and prepared for the 21st century" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 2).

According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015), Professional Standards for Educational Leaders provide a guide for developing effective leadership, which states the following:

1. "Effective education leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, visions and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student (p. 9).

2. Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being. (p. 10)

3. Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being (p. 11).

4. Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being (p. 12).

5. Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student (p. 13).

6. Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being (p. 14).

7. Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being (p. 15).

8. Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being (p. 16).

9. Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being (p. 17).

10. Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (p. 18).

"If we are truly committed to school reform we need to prepare and train leaders to be truly effective school leaders in alternative schools" (Price, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, it is only appropriate to inquire what would influence someone to become an alternative education administrator.

Summary of Literature Review

The role of an alternative education leader may differ across school divisions, thus creating an inconsistency to maintain high level leadership effectiveness. "The truth is that neither universities nor school divisions can single-handedly provide the breadth or experiences needed to adequately prepare school leaders for alternative schools who leadership will result in improving learning for incarcerated and at-risk students in correctional and alternative school settings" (Price et al., 2010, p. 301). It is important to examine the challenges in alternative education program leadership in order to develop effective, long lasting alternative education program leaders. "Because of the unique nature of alternative schools and alternative students, leaders in those settings require different skill sets to lead effectively and in turn different training skills, competences, and mindsets to provide what it takes to be successful alternative school leaders" (Price & Doney, 2009, p. 2).

"Based on the evolving needs of the at-risk student populations and gaps in the literature on leadership preparation programs for alternative education program leaders, this literature review explored gaps in the extensive support needed for current and aspiring alternative education program leaders" (Ferebee-Johns, 2017, p. 28). Moreover, examining a needs-based assessment for the alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia is a

possible bridge into additional research. Investing in specialized professional learning designed for new inexperienced alternative education administrators is paramount in order to meet the needs of aspiring alternative educational leaders. The review of literature presented pertains to the perceptions of leadership experiences of alternative education program leaders, essential leadership skills, specialized training, and preparation programs which informed their work as alternative education program leaders. This review provides foundational information for pursuing additional research on these topics.

The focus of this literature review was to discover what administrators believe are the challenges for alternative education program leadership and how those constraints determine the overall effectiveness of alternative education program leadership. In order to gain a complete understanding of what it takes to be a successful alternative education leader, it is necessary to conduct a study that examines all aspects of alternative education program leadership including: (1) experiences, (2) skills, (3) training, (4) preparation.

CHAPTER THREE: THE METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the study

Methodology is described in Chapter Three of this study. The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation needed for effective alternative education program leadership. With limited research specific to alternative education program leadership, this study may provide a basis for understanding the development of strong leadership qualities in order for leaders of alternative programs to be effective. Moreover, it may assist in developing appropriate job descriptions for alternative education program leadership positions and targeted leadership training necessary for leading alternative education programs.

This study's methodology included details associated with the research design and implementation. Additionally, key components of the study's methodology included the study population and sample, data collection and data gathering procedures, treatment and management of data, and the analysis technique used with data collected. For additional reference, a timeline outlining the steps within the research process is included.

Research Design

The methodology for this study was basic qualitative research. Worthington (2013) suggested a basic qualitative study can be used to uncover strategies, techniques, and practices of highly effective teachers and administrators. Because the aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of leadership, a basic qualitative research design was more appropriate than a quantitative research design. "Qualitative work starts with the assumption that social settings are unique, dynamic and complex. Qualitative methods provide means whereby social contexts can

be systematically examined as a whole, without breaking them down into isolated, incomplete, and disconnected variables" (Hatch, 2002, p. 9).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study. The research questions served to aid the researcher in better understanding of alternative education program leadership.

1. What leadership experiences do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

2. What leadership skills do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for individuals new to the position of alternative education leader?

3. What specialized training do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

4. How do alternative education leaders perceive their leadership preparation programs informed their work as an alternative education leader?

Research Design Justification

In this study, current K-12 alternative education program leader perceptions were identified in data towards their leadership preparation in K-12 alternative education programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia. A phenomenological qualitative study provides "understanding of how people make sense of their lives" (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). This qualitative research focused on perceptions of alternative education program leaders based on their leadership experiences. In order to better prepare new leaders of alternative education programs, the perceptions surrounding K-12 alternative education program leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia may serve as a guide for colleges and universities educational leadership programs. This

basic qualitative research used an interview methodology to collect data associated with these perceptions.

Population and Sample

This study's selected population consisted of leaders of alternative education programs. These alternative education program leaders in this study provide services to students between the ages of 5 and 18 years old. According to the VDOE (2013), these two regional programs–Project Return and Project RETURN–offer alternative education programs in 24 Virginia school divisions. These alternative education programs and school divisions were identified by the researcher from the VDOE website (www.doe.virginia.gov); requests to participate in this study were sent to the 24 school division Superintendents. The population selected for participation in this study was identified by their Superintendents as a group of four active alternative education program leaders. The four alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia were selected to participate on the basis of their experiences as K -12 alternative education program leaders.

Creswell (2014) shared that the number of participants in phenomenological studies "typically range from three to ten" (p. 239). Using purposive sampling, the researcher of this study sought to interview a sample of the 24 alternative education leaders identified in the study's participants. This sampling, which is referred to as judgment sampling, "lies largely in the assumption that the researcher has specific knowledge of the areas to be assessed and can employ this knowledge in selecting participants" (Stoops, 2012, p. 67). The study's sample consisted of alternative education leaders from the two regional alternative education programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia and determined to have alternative education programs meeting the study criteria. Although 24 participants were wanted for this study, only four

alternative education program leaders in Virginia were interviewed for this study. These four participants represent the study's sample.

Data Collection Procedures

Following IRB approval, the researcher reached out electronically to 24 Superintendents for permission to conduct research with participants within their school division—alternative education program leaders. Data collection utilized a basic design with an interview methodology. Four interviews with alternative education leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia were conducted for this research. Interviews were recorded and transcripts were created from those recordings for coding and analysis. A listing of specific questions were asked in each interview and can be found in Table 1.

To initiate the interview, the participants were presented with an information sheet to participate in this research study. Hatch (2002) indicates it is important that interview participants feel "invited to participate in a two-way conversation that treats them with respect and dignity. Interviewers should signal this respect by never starting an interview without some small talk or without explanations of research purposes and the importance of the informant to the research process" (p. 114).

Stoops (2012) suggested this approach was "to prepare the participants to consider their responses to each leadership domain" (p. 68). Initially, participants were requested to provide basic information about their previous leadership roles.

Table 1

Alignment of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. What leadership experiences do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?	1. Prior to becoming an alternative education leader, what student populations did you work with? 2. What previous leadership experiences do you as an alternative education leader perceive to be beneficial for effective leadership? 3. How, if at all, has your perception of alternative education leadership changed throughout your career?
2. What leadership skills do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for individuals new to the position of alternative education leader?	4. What essential leadership skills do you consider important for new alternative education leaders? Why do you feel these skills are essential? 5. When you were new to alternative education, did you have the essential skills listed in question 4? 6. How were the essential skills listed in question 4 obtained?
3. What specialized training do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?	7. Please list specialized training you have received for your current position as an alternative education leader. 8. How has the specialized training from question 7 supported you as an alternative education leader?
3. How do alternative education leaders perceive their leadership preparation programs informed their work as an alternative education leader?	9. What specialized leadership courses did you take in your principal preparation programs specific to alternative education? 10. How have the leadership courses in your principal preparation program informed your work as an alternative education leader?

Data Gathering Procedures

Submission to IRB was completed in the month of April in 2020 (Appendix A). Prior to conducting the interviews, formal permission was requested from the current alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia consisting of two regional alternative education program directors and 24 school division Superintendents. The two regional alternative education program directors of the 24 counties were preliminarily contacted via telephone in October 2020, to introduce this study. Preliminary permission was requested at this time to submit a cover letter (see Appendix B) to the 24 school division Superintendents once IRB approval was granted.

Following the approval from the regional leaders, a cover letter (see Appendix C) was sent electronically to each of the 24 school division Superintendents. This letter requested participation and explained the research to be conducted. Appendix B also explained the interview guidelines which implies consent of the study for invitee participation. Stoops (2012), "explained guidelines for interviews based on the current research literature that outlines strategies to ensure successful interviewing" (p.68). In addition, the cover letter informed the participants of the IRB approval. An application to receive IRB approval (see Appendix D) was submitted prior to conducting the study in December 2020.

Hatch (2002) stated that "having a purpose in mind before the interview begins will help keep the interview on track and productive" (p. 115). "First, the importance of listening must be understood in order to create an optimal interview experience" (Stoops, 2012, p. 68). Secondly, planning well before the interview begins is optimal (Stoops, 2012). Lastly, to "explore the informant's understandings" (Hatch, 2002, p. 115).

30

Prior to this study, the researcher held the alternative education program leadership role in one of the participating school divisions and their alternative education program. The researcher currently functions as an assistant principal in one of the school divisions participating in the study. A potential for bias existed; however, the study interviews were targeted toward alternative education program leadership perceptions only and the researcher no longer functioned in the capacity of an alternative education leader with any of the schools participating in the study. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that questions were presented to the participants in a consistent manner.

Data Treatment/Management

Throughout the study, the researcher-maintained all data collected on a flash-drive, which was placed in a secure and locked location. Additionally, the researcher coded the transcriptions using pseudonyms (false names) and took liberty in altering original phrasing to protect the dignity of the participants. Transcriptions of the recordings were securely uploaded to a computer that was password-protected. The researcher maintained a list that includes a key to the code. The master key will be stored for three years after the study has been completed and then will be deleted. The video/audio files were deleted after the participants confirmed that the transcription was accurate. Additionally, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal that was secured throughout the study. The researcher deleted all personal information relating to participants before analysis. All transcriptions and digital recordings used in the final analysis for this study will be destroyed upon successful completion of the dissertation defense.

Data Analysis Techniques

Questions in the interview were aligned using a panel of experts. "The basic principle of qualitative research is that data analysis should be conducted simultaneously with data

collection" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 2, as cited in Maxwell, 2005). "The present study employed typological analysis as its primary method of analyzing the collected data" (Stoops, 2012, p. 69). Stoops (2012) explained, "the rationale for selecting typological analysis is that those administrators interviewed will respond to a set of predetermined leadership" (p. 69) specialties. Hatch (2002) indicated that such an analysis can be particularly useful in studies that use interviews as the primary means of data collection.

According to Hatch (2002), a sequence of steps as typological strategies useful in analyzing data from interviews. Stoops (2012) suggested a 3-step process: "(1) typologies need to be analyzed; (2) reading the data, marking entries related to the typologies, and recording the main ideas in the entries on a summary sheet; (3) looking for patterns, relationships, or themes among the typologies; (4) looking for relationships among the patterns identified, writing patterns as generalizations, and selecting data excerpts that support the generalization" (p. 70). The researcher used content area experts to ensure that the appropriate information was being received from the study participants by the interview questions.

"Reliability for this study was maintained by coding reassessments of multiple individuals" (Ferebee-Johns, 2017, p. 59). According to Merriam (2009), themes and patterns developed consistency throughout the analysis process. Finally, the last steps of the analysis looked for themes among the patterns identified, writing generalizations about those patterns and selecting data transcriptions that support the generalization. Coding was conducted from the themes that arose from the individual interviews with alternative education program leaders. "A final interpretation of the data analysis led to the development of the study findings" (Ferebee-Johns, 2017, p. 37).

Timeline

After a successful prospectus defense in December 2020, the researcher then submitted an IRB application. IRB approval was received in February 2021. A letter requesting permission to administer a basic qualitative interview to K-12 alternative education program leaders was emailed to the 24 selected school division superintendents (see Appendix C), following IRB approval. Following superintendent approval, eight of the 24 superintendents responded allowing their alternative education program leaders to participate. Therefore, an email requesting an interview was sent to the eight alternative education program leaders in Alleghany Highlands, Culpeper, Fluvanna, Franklin, Halifax, Louisa, Madison, and Shenandoah county school divisions. (see Appendix B). Without delay, four of the eight alternative education program leaders communicated acceptance to interview. Follow up emails were sent to the four remaining alternative education program leaders. However, they were non-responsive. The researcher then proceeded to schedule interviews with the four alternative education program leaders who provided their schedule availability for interviews. Interviews were completed by March 2021. Coding and data analysis took place in March and April 2021.

Methodology Summary

In summary, this study seeks to obtain the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia concerning acquired experiences, skills, training, and preparation programs. This study utilized a basic qualitative research design to explore K-12 alternative education program leaders in an open-ended interview format as its data collection process. The use of this open-ended interview allows participants to share experiences relating to a phenomenon with less structures (Merriam, 2009). This study provided alternative education program leaders the opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions about

alternative education. The participants in this study represented four K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. School division protocols for open-ended interviews and data collections were followed. Permission to obtain were received through email letters from regional alternative education directors and school division Superintendents. The research was designed to present the effectiveness of K-12 alternative education program leadership perceptions of experiences, skills, training, and preparation programs and its impact on alternative education program leadership.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation needed for effective alternative education program leadership. The focus of this study was to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. There are four leadership specificity themes that have been established from research and literature with an emphasis on alternative education program leadership. Four research questions were developed in order to explore and understand leadership perspectives of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The following research questions were analyzed in accordance to the data that were collected:

1. What leadership experiences do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

2. What leadership skills do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for individuals new to the position of alternative education leader?

3. What specialized training do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

4. How do alternative education leaders perceive their leadership preparation programs informed their work as an alternative education leader?

This chapter reports the analyzed data of the study. The findings are shared based on the major themes that emerged from the basic qualitative interviews. Each theme is organized by the

research question mentioned above. The data were then organized by the supporting question for each specificity. The findings from each specificity are reported accordingly.

In order to maintain anonymity, each respondent is assigned a corresponding number and assigned as follows: L1, L2, L3, and L4. The participants were selected according to the following criteria:

1. Each alternative education leader possessed an administrative certification determined by the VDOE.

2. Each alternative education leader currently holds an administrative leadership position in alternative education.

3. Alternative education leaders are located in the Commonwealth of Virginia and willing to participate in the study.

4. Alternative education leaders were chosen by the researcher with the recommendation of their respective school division Superintendent.

A description of the alternative education leaders who participated in the study is as follows:

1. Alternative leader (L1) is a leader of a K-12 alternative education program with less than one year of formal administrative experience. This individual has a background of working with alternative education in PreK-12.

2. Alternative leader (L2) is a leader of a K-12 alternative education program with 13 years of administrative experience in the traditional school and three years as an alternative education leader.

3. Alternative leader (L3) is a leader of a K-12 alternative education program with 31 years of administrative experience with a background in public and private alternative education.

4. Alternative leader (L4) is a leader of a K-12 alternative education program with five years administrative experience—four years as an alternative education leader. This individual has a background in residential treatment and post-secondary education.

Explanation of Data

The 10 interview questions used for the data collection in this study were based on the four research questions that guided this research. The data were reported in the following sections by research questions. Additionally, the data relating to the interview questions were grouped according to the overarching themes of the question as they relate to the research questions.

- Interview questions one, two, and three were used to answer research question one. These interview questions focused primarily on the prior experiences of the alternative education leader and how these leaders perceive those experiences to be necessary for leadership in alternative education.
- Interview questions four, five, and six were used to answer research question two. With these questions, the target was on previous leadership skills of the alternative education leader and how they perceive those skills to be necessary for an individual new to the position of an alternative education leader.
- Interview questions seven and eight were used to answer research question three. These interview questions focused on previous specialized training received by the alternative education leader and whether they perceive it to be necessary for leadership in alternative education.
- Interview questions nine and ten were used to answer research question four. These interview questions focused on alternative education leader's perception of their

leadership preparation programs and how these programs informed their work as an alternative education leader.

Interview questions were asked of each participant as part of the data collection process for this study. The following interview questions were used in this basic qualitative research:

1. Prior to becoming an alternative education leader, what student populations did you work with?

2. What previous leadership experiences do you as an alternative education leader perceive to be beneficial for effective leadership?

3. How, if at all, has your perception of alternative education leadership changed throughout your career?

4. What essential leadership skills do you consider important for new alternative education leaders? Why do you feel these skills are essential?

5. When you were new to alternative education, did you have the essential skills listed in question 4?

6. How were the essential skills listed in question 4 obtained?

7. Please list specialized training you have received for your current position as an alternative education leader.

8. How has the specialized training from question 7 supported you as an alternative education leader?

9. What specialized leadership courses did you take in your principal preparation programs specific to alternative education?

10. How have the leadership courses in your principal preparation program informed your work as an alternative education leader?

Data Analysis

Following the accumulation of the basic qualitative interview, participants' responses were downloaded into a spreadsheet formatted with two columns; this helped to organize the responses and the commonalities which turned into specificities. The next step of the analysis process required the researcher to read each transcribed response of what was being communicated by the alternative education program leaders. During this step, notes were recorded in the second column to identify commonalities in regards to themes and patterns.

Each of the interview questions were organized as a data set using categorical coding. The researcher used false names in order to organize the data sets so they were easily identifiable (Creswell, 2014). Transcribing and coding took place at the conclusion of the basic qualitative interviews. Participant's perspectives were identified by the researcher targeting themes in interview questions, and selected similarities among them (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), when a research study solicits participants to share experiences and phenomenon, interviewing is "more open-ended and less structured" (p. 90).

At the conclusion of the data analysis, tables were created to describe similar themes and patterns (Crewell, 2014). Finally, an interpretation of the data analysis led to the development of K-12 alternative education program leadership specificity themes. The following interview questions were identified as the focus of the associated specificity theme that the researcher discovered during the data collection process:

- Interview questions one, two, and three were asked in relation to the leadership experience specificity theme.
- Interview questions four, five, and six were asked in relation to the leadership skills specificity theme.

- Interview questions seven and eight were asked in relation to the specialized training specificity theme.
- Interview questions nine and ten were asked in relation to the leadership principal specificity theme.

Data Reporting

The following are reported out by the research questions highlighting those specificity themes that were identified.

Research Question 1

What leadership experiences do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

Previous experience. The participants were asked, based on their perceptions, what student populations have they worked with in the past and currently. They were also asked about their previous leadership experiences and how they perceived those as beneficial for effective leadership. Additionally, participants were asked whether they feel leadership had changed throughout their career as an alternative education leader. Responses to these questions led participants to identifying themes of non-traditional/traditional school setting, teacher/administrator experience, and leadership changes throughout career.

Traditional/non-traditional school setting. All four participants had a background in either traditional or non-traditional school settings prior to becoming an alternative education leader. L1 stated that they had a strong alternative education background for 9 years including special education preschool. L2 stated they have a unique background working with alternative education as their previous position was in a traditional setting. L3 stated that they have a diverse background in alternative education populations including traditional and non-traditional

settings. L4 stated their background includes working as a special education teacher in a non-traditional and traditional setting.

Teacher/administrator experience. Three out of four participants reported previous experience as a teacher and/or administrator was beneficial for effective leadership. L1 stated they worked as a teacher in alternative education for nine years. L1 shared that working as a teacher is very helpful. L2 stated they had combined teacher and administrative experience of 24 years. L3 stated their previous positions have been solely as an administrator. L4 stated that they served as a special education teacher prior to their role as an administrator in AE.

Leadership changes throughout career. Two out of four participants reported their perception of alternative education program leadership had changed. L2 stated that she perceived alternative education program leadership has changed. L2 stated, "I feel very much on an island" (L2, *l*106). In addition, L4 stated that her perception of alternative education changed from a positive outlook to a negative one. L4 reported, "Well, when I first started, I was very optimistic and excited. I've gone from excitement to optimism to despair, being discouraged and frustrated" (L4, *l*27 & l33). L4 reported that school division administration prevents alternative education program leaders from helping the students in the way they want to lead them.

L3 stated they do not think their perception of leadership has changed throughout his career. L1 stated that the perception of alternative education has not changed. L1 stated, "I really don't think my philosophy and the way I do this, changed over the years, going from teacher to a leadership role. I think it's just gotten stronger as far as the need, the type of setting to be in a school system" (L1, *l*31). L3 reported, "I don't think it's changed because I always felt like every program that I've developed It wasn't about warehousing kids, it was about actually educating kids" (L3, *l*28). Participant comments were also analyzed for common themes (see Table 2).

Table 2

Supporting Comments for Leadership Experiences Specificity Theme

Leadership Experiences	Participant Comments
Traditional/Non-Traditional School Setting	*"I think you get to see a different side of things when you've worked with just non-traditional types of students that help you be an effective leader with that population."*
	"I was a teacher in alternative education for nine years and prior to that I did special education preschool."
Teacher/Administrator Experience	*"I was still working as a teacher"*
	"I was a high school English teacher"
	"You name it; I did it… residential treatment facilities, special education kids, ED, LD, MR, Autism, regular education kids from kindergarten through 12th grade. I really hit the whole spectrum."
Leadership Changes Throughout Career	*"As a leader, I don't think it's changed."*
	"I don't think it's [leadership] changed because I always felt like every program that I've developed."
	"Well, when I was first started, I was very optimistic and excited. So, I've gone from excitement to optimism to despair, being discouraged and frustrated."

Table 2 indicates the responses of the participants associated with the themes resulting from the interview questions related to research question one. All four participants identified prior leadership experiences in the traditional and/or non-traditional school settings as important for leadership in alternative education. All four participants identified as a teacher and/or administrator prior to their leadership role in alternative education. Two participants indicated their perception of alternative education program leadership throughout their career had changed.

Table 3

Leadership Experiences Specificity Theme Responses by Participant

Leadership Experiences	L1	L2	L3	L4
Traditional/Non-Traditional School Setting	X	X	X	X
Teacher/Administrator Experience	X	X	X	X
Leadership Changes Throughout Career		X		X

Research Question 2

What leadership skills do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

Essential skills. The participants were asked, based on their perceptions, what skills they considered important for new alternative education leaders. They were also asked, based on their perceptions, did they have the essential skills described previously and how were they obtained when they were new to alternative education leadership. Responses to these questions led participants to identifying themes of consistency, flexibility and on the job training.

L1 stated that being consistent with expectations, having balance in regards to communication with parents and being a problem solver are the skills needed for new alternative education program leaders. L2 stated that confidence, strength, and thinking independently are imperative to a successful alternative education leader. L2 reported feeling confident is a large focus so you are able to meet students' needs and understand that student behavior is not targeted. L3 stated they did have the essential skills as a new alternative education leader. Similarly, L4 stated that there are three essential skills building positive relationships, being flexible and learning to appreciate and value differences.

Consistency. Three out of four alternative education leaders suggested consistency as an essential skill for alternative education program leadership. L1 stated that consistency was the

only skill that they had prior to becoming an alternative education leader. L3 stated that having

all members of the staff having similar philosophies of student achievement. L3 shared, "the

leadership part in terms of having everyone on the same page within the organization" (L3, l30).

L4 stated they did have the essential skills as a new alternative education leader however they are

more advanced due to working longer in the alternative education setting. L2 and L4 reported

that learning on the job tailored their leadership skills.

Flexibility. Three out of four alternative education program leaders suggested flexibility

as an essential skill for alternative education program leadership. L2 identified an essential skill

of flexibility by taking on different roles. L2 states, "We were a core like a little pseudo clinic

over here, sometimes I'm a nurse and sometimes I'm an administrator. Sometimes I'm a mom,

so I'm used to that" (L2, l157-159). L4 stated being flexible is very important. L4 notes that

being able to change quickly because plans may not work on the way they were intended to. L3

shared, "you have to be flexible" (L3, l35).

On the job training. All four participants suggested the on-the-job training in the role as

an alternative education program leader was an essential skill for alternative education

leadership. L1 stated that staying in alternative education each year has increased knowledge of

developing ways to work with students. L2 stated that they did come in with a skill set prior to

entering alternative education. L2 shared, "I mean it definitely was learning on the job" (L2,

l165). L4 stated through experience was the sole way they obtained essential skills for alternative

education program leadership. L3 also reported, "So my philosophy is based on that experience"

(L3, l42). L4 also explained how important experience is when they stated, "Yeah, I want to say,

through the experience. Nothing that was taught in the classroom, but through experience" (L4,

l47). Participant comments were also analyzed for common themes (see Table 4).

Table 4

Supporting Comments for Leadership Skills Specificity Theme

Leadership Skills	Participant Comments
Consistency	*"Consistency is extremely important."*
	"Definitely the leadership part in terms of having everybody on the same page within the organization."
Flexibility	*"I think you have to be able to, again, work rather independently because, again, in some cases, you might be the only leader in your building and sharing lots of resources and being adaptable."*
	"Being flexible is very, very important."
On the Job Training	*"I mean it definitely was learning on the job."*
	"I was like most people... green, learning. I'm learning as I go."
	"...just years of developing strategies and ways of working with students, and just...just sticking with it."
	"Yeah, I want to say, through the experience."
	"I didn't have a lot left behind by my predecessor, and again, maybe that's unique to me and other places. That's when I started, you know, looking to see who I could connect with and just relied a lot on philosophically what I wanted to see for kids."

Table 5 indicates the responses of participants associated with the themes resulting from the interview questions related to research question two. Three participants identified consistency and flexibility were essential leadership skills important to new alternative education administrators. All four participants identified on the job training was the essential skill for individuals new in alternative education program leadership roles. All participants in the study identified essential skills for individuals new to alternative education program leadership.

Table 5

Leadership Skills Specificity Theme Responses by Participants

Leadership Skills	L1	L2	L3	L4
Consistency	X		X	X
Flexibility		X	X	X
On the Job Training	X	X	X	X

Research Question 3

What specialized training do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

Previous experience. The participants were asked, based on their perceptions, what specialized training they have received for their current position as an alternative education program leader and how has that training supported them as an alternative education leader. Responses to these questions led participants to identifying themes of no training, supported and not supported.

No training. All four participants stated they did not receive specialized training in their current position as an alternative education leader. L4 states, "you either have it or you don't" (L4, *l*66).

Supported. One out of four participants stated specialized training they received somewhat supported them as an alternative education program leader. L1 stated that responsibilities given by supervisors have supported their role in their current position as an alternative education leader. L4 stated that learning to listen and not invoke opinion supported them as an alternative education leader but they did not receive specialized training in communication.

Not supported. Three out of four participants stated they did not receive specialized training therefore, did not feel it supported them as an alternative education program leader. L2, L3, and L4 did not feel specialized training supported them as an alternative education leader due to the unavailability of specialized training specific to alternative education program leaders. L2 stated in question seven that they didn't not receive any specialized training as an alternative education leader; however they have attended training that is applicable to alternative education. Participant comments were also analyzed for common themes (see Table 6).

Table 7 indicates the responses of participants associated with the themes resulting from the interview questions related to research question three. Four participants did not receive specialized training necessary for alternative education program leadership. One participant reported they felt the specialized training they received somewhat supported them as an

Table 6

Supporting Comments for Leadership Specialized Training Specificity Theme

Leadership Specialized Training	Participant Comments
No Training Received	*"No."*
	"So, formally, nothing."
	"I don't think there's anything. I'm going to be honest with you, I don't think of all the education that I have received, other than taking a conflict resolution class that really applies to all that."
	"I can't say I had any specialized training in alternative education."
Felt Supported	*"Basically, by them allowing me to step in and take over responsibilities. I had two supervisors that let me take charge and gave the responsibilities that allowed me to kind of learn on the job."*

Did Not Feel Supported	*"Again, it's tough because there really wasn't any [support]. I didn't get too much."*
	"I'm in a program right now that's on applied educational neuroscience but I pursued that myself. I would say it's not specialized to alternative education. It's certainly applicable but not specialized to."

alternative education program leader. Three participants reported they did not feel the specialized training they received supported them as an alternative education leader. All participants in the study did not receive specialized training necessary for leadership in alternative education.

Table 7

Leadership Specialized Training Specificity Theme Responses by Participants

Leadership Specialized Training	**L1**	**L2**	**L3**	**L4**
No Training Received	X	X	X	X
Felt Supported	X			
Did Not Feel Supported		X	X	X

Research Question 4

What do alternative education leaders perceive their leadership preparation programs informed their work as an alternative education leader?

Principal preparation programs. The participants were asked, based on their perceptions, what specialized leadership courses in their principal preparation program specific to alternative education and how did those courses inform their work as an alternative education program leader. Responses to these questions led participants to identifying themes of moderately informed, and did not inform.

All four participants reported they did not take specialized courses during their principal preparation programs specific to alternative education.

Moderately informed. One out of four participants stated their program moderately informed their work as an alternative education leader. L1 stated that coursework such as budget helped provide an overview of what schools as a whole have to look at. L1 also stated that all the courses gave them a diverse amount of information they could implement as an alternative education leader.

Did not inform. Three out of four participants stated they did not take specialized leadership courses in their principal preparation programs specific to alternative education. Therefore, three of four participants reported their principal preparation programs did not inform their work as an alternative education leader. Participant comments were also analyzed for common themes (Table 8).

Table 8

Supporting Comments for Leadership/Principal Preparation Specificity Theme

Leadership Principal Preparation	Participant Comments
No Specialized Leadership Courses or Program of Study	*"Nothing, there's nothing in* [principal prep programs]. *No."*
	"Not at all."
	"Honestly, I don't recall anything specific to alternative education."
Moderately Prepared by Courses/Program of Study	*"So, all the courses gave me a little bit of everything."*
	"I think my courses and my leadership program moderately have contributed but living the experience has been the learning."
Not Prepared by Courses/ Program of Study	*"There wasn't anything I took in education in those prep classes that prepared me to be an alternative education person."*

	"It hasn't."

Table 9 indicates the responses of participants associated with the themes resulting from the interview questions related to research question four. Four participants stated they did not take specialized training courses in their principal preparation programs specific to alternative education. One identified their leadership courses as somewhat important and minimally informed their work as an alternative education leader. Three participants in the study identified that due to the absence of specialized leadership courses in their principal preparation programs, their work was not informed as an alternative education leader.

Table 9

Leadership Training/Principal Preparation Specificity Theme Responses by Participants

Leadership Training/Preparation	**L1**	**L2**	**L3**	**L4**
No Specialized Leadership Courses/Program of Study	X	X	X	X
Moderately Prepared by Courses/Program of Study	X			
Not Prepared by Courses/Program of Study		X	X	X

Summary of Data

The alternative education program leaders that were interviewed in this study on the experiences, skills and training necessary in alternative education program leadership had many similarities in their responses. In response to research question one regarding experiences perceived as necessary in alternative education program leadership; traditional, non-traditional school settings as well as teacher and administrative experience were all important components. In response to research question two regarding skills perceived as necessary in alternative education program leadership, consistency, flexibility, and on the job training were all observed

50

as key focus areas for alternative education program leadership. In response to research question three and four, specialized training and leadership courses in principal preparation programs were perceived as necessary in alternative education program leadership should all be considered. Chapter Five provides the summary of findings, implications of findings, and recommendations for future research and reflections of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation necessary for effective alternative education program leadership. This basic qualitative research used an interview methodology to collect data relating to alternative education program leaders' perceptions. Through interview responses, themes surfaced, revealing perspectives of K-12 alternative education program leaders concerning effective alternative education program leadership. This study addressed the following four research questions that guided the examination of K-12 alternative education program leaders.

1. What leadership experiences do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

2. What leadership skills do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for individuals new to the position of alternative education leader?

3. What specialized training do the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education leaders perceive to be necessary for leadership in alternative education?

4. How do alternative education leaders perceive their leadership preparation programs informed their work as an alternative education leader?

Summary of Findings

After review and analysis of data collected in this study, four findings emerged. Each finding is summarized and connected to previous research examined within the study's literature review.

Finding 1

        Alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia report previous leadership position(s) to be beneficial for effective alternative education program leadership. Three out of four participants mentioned working in a non-traditional setting prior to becoming an alternative education leader. All four participants mentioned having worked with special education students prior to their alternative education program leadership role. Three out of four participants were previously an administrator prior to their position as an alternative education leader. This finding aligns with research conducted by Ferebee-Johns (2017). This research concluded K-12 alternative school program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia encountered previous career experiences with students who are placed in non-traditional settings. Moreover, Price et al. (2010), found that leaders who have a growth mindset are able to work better with challenging students.

Finding 2

        Alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia report that essential skills of consistency and flexibility are necessary for new administrators to the leadership position in alternative education. Three out of four participants indicated that consistency was perceived to be the most essential leadership skill for new alternative education administrators. Two participants indicated that flexibility is an essential skill perceived to be learned through previous experiences. Four participants mentioned that relationship building is imperative in alternative education program leadership. Three out of four participants felt they possessed the essential skills of consistency and flexibility prior to entering their alternative education program leadership role due to their prior experiences in the non-traditional setting.

These perceptions are supported by research conducted by Price (2009), "training new leaders who understand the intricate characteristics of at-risk and alternative learners can help ensure success for staff and students in alternative schools" (p. 1). Moreover, Ferebee-Johns' (2017) research supports that "secondary alternative school principals perceive that it is necessary for individuals new to the position to be skilled in building relationships" (p. 51).

Finding 3

Alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia did not receive specialized training for their current leadership position. All four participants perceived that they did not receive specialized training for their current leadership role in alternative education; however, each of the four participants perceived that their special education law course taken during their principal preparation program was applicable to alternative education but was not formal specialized training. Three out of four participants did not perceive their specialized training supported them as an alternative education leader. Moreover, all four participants perceived that their essential skills were obtained through on the job training.

Research supporting Price & Martin (2010), aligns with finding three stating, "there is little research on exactly what the leaders of alternative education programs need in terms of skills, preparation, and training to be successful" (p. 299). Similarly, the research of Price et al. (2010), supports "even with traditional preparation, beginning and inexperienced practitioners are easily overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the what of school leadership, and may contend the training leaders receive is off target" (p. 299).

Finding 4

Alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia's leadership preparation programs have not informed their work as K-12 alternative education program leaders. Three out of four participants focused on the need for coursework specific to alternative education. Three of four participants perceived their leadership courses did not inform their work as an alternative education leader, while one out of three participants felt their leadership preparation programs moderately prepared them for their work as an alternative education leader.

Research conducted by Price et al. (2010), aligns with this finding in which "neither universities nor school divisions are able to adequately prepare school leaders for alternative leadership" (p. 2). Moreover, Ferebee-Johns (2017), supports the understanding that principal preparation programs offered to K-12 alternative education program leaders did not inform their work in a leadership role.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation necessary for effective alternative education program leadership. The findings of this study indicate that alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia enter into their leadership roles without specialized training and without formal alternative administrator preparation from their principal preparation programs. Moreover, the study found that alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia are compelled to rely on essential skills obtained through prior experiences and other disciplines (i.e. special

education law) in order to provide effective leadership in the K-12 alternative education programs.

Implications

The data collected during this study were used to determine the perceived impact on the necessary experiences, skills, training and preparation to be a leader. The study participants also suggested what specialized training was needed to have effective leadership in alternative education. The results of these findings could assist aspiring school leaders to become better informed on the specificities of alternative education program leadership.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have implications for alternative education program leaders, administrators at the school level and college leadership preparatory programs as they explore specialized training and investigate essential skill sets to support alternative education program leaders. These findings will allow alternative education administrators to lead more effectively which will positively impact their programs.

Implication 1

Aspiring alternative education program leaders should consider working with non-traditional student populations/environments prior to entering a leadership role in alternative education. This implication is associated with Findings one, two and three. The four participants in this study perceive that working as an educator in a traditional setting does not offer the adequate environmental exposure for leading non-traditional students. It cannot be accurately be construed that these findings are indicative of all Alternative Education leaders in Virginia. Non-traditional school settings provide opportunities to novice administrators that are not characteristic of a traditional setting.

56

Implication 2

The VDOE should consider implementing formalized, skill-based training opportunities specific to individuals new to alternative education program environments. This implication is associated with Findings two **and** four. Essential skill training for alternative education program leadership is perceived to be lacking from leadership preparation programs.

Implication 3

Central office administration should consider exploring and providing specialized training for alternative education program leaders. Finding three and four are associated with this implication. All four participants in this study perceive division-level alternative education specialized training would assist new and current leaders in areas such as conflict resolution and trauma informed care. Including these topics would address the needs of alternative education program leaders in order to provide the opportunity to best serve the students assigned to alternative education environments. Alternative education program leaders participating in this study shared that topics such as trauma informed care, equity, and conflict resolution would be beneficial in meeting the needs of inexperienced administrators.

Implication 4

Higher educational institutions should consider including a leadership curriculum that provides training and or certifications necessary for effective alternative education program leadership. This implication is associated with Finding 2, 3, and 4. As is the need for alternative education leadership, there is a growing emphasis on the training required to effectively lead these programs. Equipping alternative education program leaders with training and/or certifications including topics such as MANDT, Olweus, and Zones of Regulation will

afford school division alternative education program leaders the opportunity to prepare current and aspiring leaders for leading nontraditional student environments.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study may have implications for the future research in K-12 alternative education program leadership. This section details suggestions for future research.

1. Future research could include qualitative perspectives of K-12 alternative education program teachers in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This would give a more targeted view from current practitioners of alternative education programs.

2. Future research could include the use of a survey, or quantitative based studies that present a statistical analysis of unique leadership practices of K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

3. Future research could include a qualitative perspective of K-12 alternative education students of their perceptions of alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This methodology would allow nontraditional students the opportunity to reveal what they perceive to be valuable in an alternative education leader.

4. Explore leadership preparation programs throughout the state of Virginia to find out if any have K-12 alternative education coursework.

5. Expanding the setting to the entire state of Virginia could further the study. Increasing the sample size to include all alternative education program leaders in the state of Virginia.

6. Conducting a similar study during a non-pandemic environment.

Conclusion

The data collected in this study support that K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia perceive there is a lack in leadership preparation and school division level training offerings. The data also supports that K-12 alternative education program leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia are not supported with the proper training necessary to be effective leaders in the alternative education environment. There is a strong agreement among the alternative education program leaders in this study that previous leadership experiences are perceived to be the most impactful on their effectiveness as an alternative education program leader. Additionally, K-12 alternative education program leaders are relying solely on prior experiences and learned essential skills as preparation for alternative education program leadership. Furthermore, three of four of the K-12 alternative education program leaders participating in this study believe they were not formally prepared for their positions by their leadership preparation programs, and they were unable to identify coursework that informed their work as an effective alternative education program leader.

Reflections

This study was intriguing on the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leaders. I began this study with the perception that most alternative education program leaders acquired essential skill sets for the alternative education setting from formalized training. Upon submitting my request to conduct research to the 24 school superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia, I learned that this type of study was going to be difficult due to the stressors on educators associated with the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Most importantly, the findings from this study confirmed that there is a deficit placed on alternative education program leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Traditional school-

based administrators and aspiring administrators are being placed in leadership positions without specialized training with the most at-risk students in the school division and solely depending on prior experiences to guide their leadership practices.

Given the opportunity to re-conduct this study, I would choose to research during a non-pandemic year. Unpredictable schedule changes, and arguably the toughest year in education in this century; has prevented participation by school divisions. By eliminating the stressors associated with the global pandemic, a re-enactment of this study would possibly provide deeper insight on the perceptions of K-12 alternative education program leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

APPENDIX A

Certificate of Complete for CITI Program

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 27-Apr-2020
Expiration Date 27-Apr-2023
Record ID 32462062

This is to certify that:

Angela Thiemann

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Basic Responsible Conduct of Research Course	(Curriculum Group)
Basic Responsible Conduct of Research Course	(Course Learner Group)
1 - RCR	(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w62d66fc1-1688-4193-b41b-7d3cf444e253-32462062

APPENDIX B

Invitation Email to Alternative Education Leaders

Dear Colleague:

My name is Mrs. Angela Amiss Thiemann and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. As part of my dissertation study, I am researching the perceptions of K -12 leadership in alternative education. My study focuses on the potential impact of specialized leadership training/preparation on the school environment. My research topic is a direct result of my interactions with alternative education leaders who are responsible for leading alternative programs within the Commonwealth of Virginia. The title of my Dissertation is: Perceptions of K-12 Alternative Education Leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia (#20-697). This study is designed to examine the perceptions of effective leadership for K-12 alternative education leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I am conducting basic qualitative interviews via Zoom and will be recorded, with participant permission. The purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions of K-12 Alternative Education Leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the experiences, skills, training, and preparation needed for effective Alternative Education Leadership.

It is my hope that you will agree to be a participant in this study. This study is highly confidential and information obtained will be kept strictly private. No identifying information linking you to this study will be included in the data reporting. You may withdraw from the study at any time. The study will take approximately 45 minutes.

If you have questions regarding this study you may contact me at 540-205-4269. Additionally, my committee chairperson is Dr. Ted. S. Price. Lastly, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program has reviewed this research study. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, you may contact Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program @ irb@vt.edu or (540) 231-3732.

If you have not received a response from you by the week of February 15, 2021, a reminder email will be sent.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Angela Amiss Thiemann
angelat@vt.edu
540.205.4269

APPENDIX C

Email Request for Permission to Superintendents

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Mrs. Angela Amiss Thiemann and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. My doctoral dissertation is titled, "Perceptions of K-12 Alternative Education Leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia" (#20-697).

I am conducting basic qualitative interviews via Zoom and will be recorded, with participant permission. The purpose of this correspondence is to respectfully request permission for me to include your alternative school leaders in my study. My research topic is a direct result of my interactions with alternative school leaders who are responsible for leading K-12 alternative education programs within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Please be assured that responses from school leaders will be kept strictly confidential.

No identifying information linking your school district to this study will be included in the data reporting. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. If you have questions regarding this study you may contact me at 540-205-4269. Lastly, this research study has been submitted to the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program for review. Should you have questions or concerns about the study's conduct, you may contact the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program @ irb@vt.edu or (540) 231-3732.

With your permission, I would like to contact individuals assigned who lead alternative schools in your district to participate in my study. Thank you in advance for your consideration to assist with completing my dissertation study.

Sincerely,

Angela A. Thiemann
angelat@vt.edu
540.205.4269

APPENDIX D

VIRGINIA TECH.

Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 22, 2021

TO: Ted S Price, Angela Amiss Thiemann Mrs

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Perceptions of K-12 Alternative Education Leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia

IRB NUMBER: 20-697

Effective February 19, 2021, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **February 19, 2021**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

64

Perceptions of K-12 Alternative Education Program Leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia

skills in special education in Southeastern Pennsylvania",
Proquest, 20111003
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Internet   25 words — < 1%

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13 Chatwin, Nicole Erica. "Personality Traits and
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ProQuest

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Gonzalez, Adam Sales. "Teacher support as a   18 words — < 1%
protective factor against sadness and hopelessness for
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the 2015 Texas Alternative School Survey", Children and Youth
Services Review, 2018
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Internet   18 words — < 1%

17 Crandall, William R.. "Outside the box leadership:
A mixed method study of alternative leadership   17 words — < 1%
professional development.", Proquest, 2014.
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18	www.hraljournal.com Internet	15 words — < 1%
19	www.theshaktijournal.com Internet	14 words — < 1%
20	scholarcommons.usf.edu Internet	13 words — < 1%
21	Edsell, Timothy Owen. "A study of the perceptions of administrators and faculty regarding the relevancy and frequency of effective characteristics of alternative schools in Indiana", Proquest, 20111109 ProQuest	12 words — < 1%
22	Talley, Raquel C.. "A Qualitative Study of Principals' Experiences of the Principal Evaluation Process in a Major Urban District in the United States.", Howard University, 2019 ProQuest	11 words — < 1%
23	www.cn.edu Internet	11 words — < 1%
24	Culotta, Patricia Hall. "Critical dimensions of the first-time superintendency in the Commonwealth of Virginia", Proquest, 20111004 ProQuest	10 words — < 1%
25	Matthieu-Kodjovi, Marjory. "How Do K-8 Principals Cultivate Leadership in Their Assistant Principals?", Concordia University Chicago, 2020 ProQuest	10 words — < 1%
26	Thomas, Jay Darrell. "Alternative Learning Programs: Investigation of Key Practices.", The	10 words — < 1%

35 Turner, Kat. "An Assessment of the Needs of At-Risk Students Who Choose Alternative Schools", Proquest, 2014.
ProQuest

9 words — < 1%

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Internet

9 words — < 1%

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9 words — < 1%

39 springfieldeducation.org
Internet

9 words — < 1%

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